Starr King School for the Ministry
Environmental Ethics and Liberation
Instructor: Rev. Sofía Betancourt
Spring, 2013

Syllabus:

This online course grounds its exploration in the fundamentals of environmental ethics, starting with the work of Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic and the following generations of ethical systems based in notions of an earth community, and progressing to debate over whether nonhuman nature has natural rights. From these fundamentals the class will expand its scope to specific liberation traditions within environmental ethics, covering moral questions posed by ecofeminism, indigenous human rights debates, liberation theology, and issues of environmental racism and oppression.

The class will be broken into four main areas of work, with each week containing a lecture and readings that center around one or two main scholars, listed below. The listed texts will be excerpted, and supplemented with both writings and alternate types of materials from other thinkers. Students will be expected to complete the reading (approximately 150 pages per week), write a brief reading response that includes sharing one outside resource with the class, and participate in dialogue about personal and spiritual responses to the topics of the week. Students may choose to skip submitting reading responses for two of the weeks during the semester. Students taking the course for a letter grade will negotiate a final project with the instructor, due in the last week of the class.

Required Texts:
The required texts for this course are large books, which makes them expensive. They are sizable collections of important articles and thinkers. Most are frequently used as textbooks and can usually be easily found used online. I would highly encourage students to seek copies at venues like abebooks.com

Please note abbreviations of these texts for weekly readings below.

IT&E
Grim, John, ed. *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001.
ISBN: 0945454287, List Price: $40.00

EcoS
Kearns, Laurel, and Catherine Keller. *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
ISBN: 0823227464, List Price $34.00

TSE:
Gottlieb, Roger S., ed. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment, 2nd Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
ISBN: 0415943604, List Price: $54.95

Course Objectives:
Students are expected to:

- Gain a working vocabulary for the academic study of religious ethics in general, and environmental ethics specifically;
- Acquire a basic understanding of the foundations of environmental ethics in the West;
- Explore the intersections of liberation theoethics and the environment;
- Diversify their engagement with the dominant canon of environmental ethics by studying scholars, religious traditions, and counter-oppressive perspectives that are often relegated to the margins of the field; and
- Develop a working understanding of the role of religion and ministerial leadership in undermining the effects of environmental devastation.

Unit One - Foundations:
This unit will focus on the foundations of Western, primarily Christian, environmental ethics giving us a common language and sense of the history of moral thought on environmental issues. It will ground us in the basic frameworks used in religious understandings of environmental responsibility, begin our dialog on the inherent rights of nonhuman nature, and also provide a basis for approaching more libratory environmental ethics.

Week 1 – Origins: Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson
Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Video: Aldo Leopold bio
Video: Rachel Carson's Silent Spring at 50 Years

Weekly Readings:

- "Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics," by Philip Cafaro
- IT&E: Nature and Culture: Problematic Concepts for Native Americans, by Jack D. Forbes
- IT&E: Contextualizing the Environmental Struggle, by Tom Greaves
- EcoS: Getting Over "Nature": Modern Bifurcations, Postmodern Possibilities, by Barbara Muraca
- TSE: from "Walking," by Henry David Thorough
- TSE: from "Nature", by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- TSE: The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, by Lynn White

Week 2 – Deane Curtin, Postcolonial Environmental Ethics
Deane Curtin, *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World*
Video: Nation Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta

Weekly Readings:

- IT&E: Intellectual Property Rights and the Sacred Balance: Some Spiritual Consequences from the Commercialization of Traditional Resources, by Darrel Addison Posey
- IT&E: The Sacred Egg: Worldview, Ecology, and Development in West Africa, by Ogbu U. Kalu
- EcoS: Creatio Ex Nihilo, Terra Nullius, and the Erasure of Presence, by Whitney A. Bauman
- EcoS: Caribou and Carbon Colonialism: Toward a Theology of Arctic Place, by Marion Grau
- EcoS: Felling Sacred Groves: Appropriation of a Christian Tradition for Antienvironmentalism, by Nicole A. Roskos
- TSE: On Sustainability, by B. D. Sharma

Week 3 – History of Environmental Ethics and Questions of Value: Roderick Frazier Nash and Holmes Rolston III

Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*
Holmes Rolston III, *Conserving Natural Value*

Weekly Reading:

- IT&E: Contemporary Native American Responses to Environmental Threats in Indian Country, by Gonzales and Nelson

Week 4 – Earth Spirit: Thomas Berry and Larry Rasmussen

Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*
Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*

Video: Religion and a New Environmental Ethic

Weekly Readings:

- IT&E: The Life and Bounty of the Mesoamerican Sacred Mountain, by María Elena Bernal-García
- IT&E: Melanesian Religion, Ecology, and Modernization in Papua New Guinea, by Simeon B. Namunu
- IT&E: Interface between Traditional Religion and Ecology in the Igorots, by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

Week 5 – Reimagining Tradition: Willis Jenkins

Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*

Video: Faith and the Environment

Weekly Readings:

- EcoS: Hearing the Outcry of Mute Things: Toward a Jewish Creation Theology, by Lawrence Troster

- TSE: An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis: Issues of Justice, by Nawal H. Ammar
- TSE: Hinduism and Deep Ecology, by Christopher Key Chapple
- TSE: To Save All Beings: Buddhist Environmental Activism, by Stephanie Kaza

Unit Two - Ecofeminism:
This unit will begin to consider more diverse approaches to environmental ethics, studying the moral wisdom of feminist thinkers who seek to challenge patriarchal assumptions and diversify the traditional, western philosophic and theological approaches to debates over how best to engage problems of environmental devastation in our religious communities.

Week 6 – Introducing Ecofeminism: Heather Eaton and Grace Kao
Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*
Grace Kao, "The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics"

Video: Dr. Vandana Shiva on Ecofeminism and Biodiversity

Weekly Readings:
- "Trees as Ancestors: Ecofeminism in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad," by Farzaneh Milani
- TSE: Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature, by Rosemary Radford Reuther
- EcoS: Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics: A Comparative View, by Rosemary Radford Reuther
- TSE: Messages from the Past: the World of the Goddess, by Riane Eisler
- TSE: Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism, by Shamara Shantu Riley

Week 7 – Ecofeminist Philosophy: Val Plumwood
Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*
Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*

Weekly Reading:
- EcoS: Grounding the Spirit: An Ecofeminist Pneumatology, by Sharon Betcher

Week 8 – Ecofeminism and Liberation: Ivone Gebara
Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*

Weekly Readings:
- TSE: Sensuous Minds and the Possibilities of a Jewish Ecofeminist Practice, by Irene Diamond and David Seidenburg
- TSE: Gaia Meditations, by John Seed and Joanna Macy

Unit Three - Liberation Theology and Environmental Ethics:
This unit will bridge liberation theology and environmental ethics to consider the impact of additional forms of injustice – such as poverty, racism, and the domination of the Global North – in seeking the good from an environmental perspective. We will consider issues of indigeneity and human rights as they complicate the desire to minimize human domination over the earth.

Week 9 – A Preferential Option for the Earth: Leonardo Boff
Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*

Video: Landfill Harmonic Film Teaser

Weekly Readings:
- "The Liberation of Humanity and Nature," by Eric Katz
- TSE: Saving the World: Religion and Politics in the Environmental Movement, by Roger S. Gottlieb
- IT&E: Learning from Ecological Ethnicities: Toward a Plural Political Ecology of Knowledge, by Pramod Parajuli
- IT&E: Indigenous Education and Ecology: Perspectives of an American Indian Educator, by Gregory Cajete
- TSE: Sacred Rivers, Sacred Dams: Competing Visions of Social Justice and Sustainable Development Along the Narmada, by William F. Fisher

Week 10 – Environmentalism vs. Animal Liberation: J. Baird Callicott and Andrew Linzey
J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair"
Andrew Linzey, "Liberation Theology and the Oppression of Animals"
Andrew Linzey, "So Close and Yet So Far: Animal Theology and Ecological Theology"

Weekly Readings:
- Dale Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic"
- Roger Crisp, "Animal Liberation is not an Environmental Ethic"
- J. Baird Callicot, "'Back Together Again' Again"
- Brian Luke, "Solidarity Across Diversity: Environmentalism and Animal Liberation"

Unit Four - Countering Environmental Racism and Oppression:
This unit will focus on the often unrecognized or ignored worldviews and oppressive ideologies that maintain systems of oppression in connection with the legacy of human impact on the environment. We will engage realities of violence, environmental racism, and crisis while focusing on liberatory measures to dismantling environmental injustice.

Week 11 – Race and Environmental Liberation: George Tinker, Delores Williams, and James Cone
James Cone, "Whose Earth is it Anyway?"
George Tinker, "An American Indian Response to EcoJustice"
Delores Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies"

Video: Ron Finley: A Guerilla Gardener in South Central L.A.

Weekly Readings:
- "Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice: Moral Theory in the Making," by Larry Rasmussen
- "Between Dishwater and the River: Creation and the Black Woman's Body," by Sofía Betancourt
- "Black Environmental Liberation Theology," by Diana Glave
- TSE: African American Resources for a More Inclusive Liberation Theology, by Theodore Walker, Jr.

Week 12 – Environmental Justice: Rob Nixon, Dorceta Taylor, and Robert Bullard
Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*
Dorceta Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change*
Robert Bullard, *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Polution*

Video: Stewart Brand: 4 Environmental 'Heresies'

Weekly Readings:
- TSE: The Cochambaba Declaration on Water: Globalization, Privatization, and the Search for Alternatives
- TSE: Seeking Eco-Justice in the South African Context, by Ernst Conradie, et al
- EcoS: Divining New Orleans: Invoking Wisdom for the Redemption of Place, by Anne Daniell
- TSE: Statements by the United Church of Christ on Environmental Racism in St Louis
- TSE: Principles of Environmental Justice

Week 13 – Reclaiming Place: bell hooks and David Smith
bell hooks, *Belonging*
David Smith, *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference*

Video: Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement

Weekly Readings:
- "Belonging to the Land," by David Mas Masumoto
- "Sharing Breath: Some Links Between Land, Plants, and People," by Enrique Salmon

- "Learning the Grammar of Animacy," by Robin Kimmerer
- EcoS: Restoring Earth, Restored to Earth: Toward an Ethic for Reinhabiting Place, by Daniel T. Spencer

Week 14 – Seeds of Hope: Roger Gottlieb and Claire Butterfield
Roger Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*

Video: Rev. Dr. Claire Butterfield, Parliament of World Religions Webinar on Greening Your Religious Community

Weekly Readings:
- EcoS: Talking the Walk: A Practice-Based Environmental Ethics as Grounds for Hope, by Anna Peterson
- EcoS: Constructing Nature at a Chapel in the Woods, by Richard R. Bohannon II
- EcoS: Cries of Creation, Ground for Hope: Faith, Justice, and the Earth Interfaith Worship Service, by Jane Nickell and Lawrence Troster
- TSE: Into the Future, by Thomas Berry